

## An explanation on behavior patterns / Why (adaptive and maladaptive) behaviors occur

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**The Elements of behavior patterns** (adaptive and maladaptive) are maintained by the following

- Environmental cues
- The function of the behavior is working (objective is reached)
- Often sequence driven
- Once a behavior becomes a pattern, it is much more predictable
- All behaviors that increase over time are being reinforced
- Most behaviors are relational (exception is *stimming*, automatic reinforcing behaviors that produce pleasure or some level of comfort on their own, requiring no environmental input or response).

### **Behavior patterns**

Behavior science (Applied Behavior Analysis) is the field in which behavior patterns are broken down and analyzed to better understand *why, when, where, and with whom* behaviors are learned, maintained, and extinguished. To increase behaviors, there must be sufficient reinforcement once the behavior is initiated and/or completed. To create the opportunity for a behavior to increase, the environment must also be conducive to support such behavior.

*At the most basic level, behavior patterns are broken down into a three-part sequence:*

**Antecedent → Behavior +/- → Consequence (Reinforcer or Punisher)**

**SD (Discriminative Stimulus) → Behavior +/- → Consequence (Reinforcer or Punisher)**

When the highly preferred event follows (the initiation of) a certain behavior, and the frequency of that behavior increases over time, then the highly preferred event is called a **reinforcer**. FYI – The opposite is also true (a decrease in behavior will occur due to unpleasant consequences following such behavior – which is called a **punisher**). Once the pattern is established where the behavior increases over time due to being followed

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by one or more reinforcers, the SD is the environmental cue that signals the immediate availability of the reinforcer if the behavior occurs. The SD is part of the Antecedent, which is the overall environmental condition that occurs leading up to the behavior.

SD → Behavior + → Reinforcer

SD → Running on a treadmill + → Social recognition and a digital award through the exercise app.

*The SD could be that the treadmill is available and the exercise app signals that the workout is about to begin.*

SD → Playing a video game + → Social connections through a multiplayer platform, leveling up as a group.

*The SD could be a group text that alerts everyone that people are getting online to play.*

SD → A child hitting his sibling + → Sibling backs off, gives up the toy, runs to mom.

*The SD would depend on the function of hitting. If the function was to get more space to oneself, the SD could be the close proximity of the sibling in the absence of the adult being nearby to intervene. If the function was to get the toy, then the SD could be the close proximity of the toy and sibling in the absence of the adult being nearby to intervene. If the function was to get (mom's) attention, then the SD could be mom multitasking, being on the phone, etc. but close enough where she would have to come and intervene if the sibling cried or yelled for mom.*

In many of these examples above, there can be a history of behavior and reinforcement

There are **five broad categories of reinforcers**:

1. To gain attention / Social
2. To gain access to a tangible or event
3. To avoid a demand or an unwanted event
4. To escape a worsening situation
5. Automatic reinforcement

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The first four are contingent on an environmental response. The fifth, or automatic reinforcement is self-driven, meaning the behavior is done for the sake of the behavior itself. Examples: chewing gum, jumping on a trampoline by yourself, humming to yourself, meditation, or stimming (flapping hands, repeating the same phrase over and over). With automatic reinforcement, there is often a sensory component; there can even be a physiological response.

See **additional documents and resources:**

- **PBS flowchart**, that visually breaks down the different components of behaviors and interventions.
- **Review Sheet – PBS Parenting**, which also provides the visual breakdown of behavior with a series of strategies.
- **Use of Rewards and Consequence**, a guide to using positive reinforcement and limit setting through predetermined consequences.